

Lorenz Böniger. *Die deutsche Einwanderung nach Florenz im Spätmittelalter.* The Medieval Mediterranean: Brill, 2006. x + 412 pp. \$167.00, cloth, ISBN 978-90-04-15047-8.



Reviewed by William C. Crossgrove

Published on H-German (January, 2008)

Lorenz Böniger works as an editor on the critical edition of the letters of Lorenzo de' Medici, and he is thoroughly versed in the archival resources of Florence. His new study reveals in full measure command of the available documentation in providing details from the lives of ordinary artisans who sought their fortune far from their homelands in the city on the Arno. From the perspective of official records, this could include people from the Low Countries and places further north and east as well as what we now think of as Germany. The opportunities for Germans to find work in Florence were greatest for about a century after 1370, with demand for workers rising during the recovery following the ravages of the Black Death and diminishing in the context of political unrest and economic decline in the late fifteenth century. Even at the height of German immigration, their numbers probably never reached even two percent of the Florentine population. The first six chapters will be necessary reading for those interested in German emigration to Italy in the late Middle Ages. The final chapter deserves wider dissemination; a revised version ought to be published in a major German Studies journal

and/or in a journal specializing in the history of cartography.

In the introduction, Böniger discusses general methodological questions, including the fact that new arrivals in Italian cities were routinely given Italianized names, names that are not always easy to connect up with their German names. He also notes that Florence was hardly the most important target city for German workers in Italy, although it stands out for the quality of its records, in which he is thoroughly immersed.

The particular focus of this volume is workers and artisans as opposed to some earlier studies that focus on notables and mercenaries. The first chapter considers how ordinary citizens might have managed to finance a trip to Italy and what might have happened to them when they got there. Böniger notes that compared to some Italian cities, especially Rome and Venice, Florence did not have as large a network of brotherhoods and support organizations. Some of the evidence we have about Germans in Florence indeed comes from the records of criminal proceedings brought against those unable (or unwilling) to pay debts

they owed (or were accused of owing). It is plausible to assume, and the available records suggest, that many who came intending to stay only long enough to earn a nest egg found themselves impoverished, unable to finance their return.

The second chapter is an attempt to define the scope of immigration from about 1370 to around 1500. A great demand for weavers emerged soon after about 1370, and these seem to have come particularly from the Low Countries and from Northern Germany. Other skills and crafts for which there appears to have been demand include agricultural work and glass blowing, as indicated by various tax relief measures. Florentine officials seem to have been constantly concerned that immigrant workers not marry local women and remove dowry capital from Florence. Near the end of the chapter, Böniger reviews previous estimates of the likely percentage of the population made up by German immigrants and settles on an estimate of about 1 percent. He concludes the chapter by discussing several individual cases and how they presumably fared in Florence.

The third chapter is devoted to discussion of how immigrants adapted to their new surroundings, including topics such as language learning, places to stay, availability of credit, and love and marriage. Böniger discusses in more detail the cases of three families, the Riccardi, the Sizzi, and the Frizzi. The Riccardi, descendants of a Cologne tailor, became wealthy merchants and were completely assimilated within three generations. The Sizzi, also descendants of a tailor, remained artisans in contact with other German immigrants and disappear from the records within three generations. The Frizzi probably descended from a cobbler, and had even less success, disappearing even earlier from the records.

Chapter 4 deals with the German confraternities. While they were not as significant in Florence as were those in Venice and Rome, they nonetheless played a significant role for a time. They served to provide financial, moral, and legal

support for the immigrants, and often assumed quasi-religious functions in the communities. These societies had sometimes difficult relations with the Florentine guilds and officials, though their function in preserving law and order was widely appreciated. The Brotherhood of Saint Catherine appears to have appealed especially to south Germans. Indeed, resolving disputes was often an important function for them. The Brotherhood of Saint Barbara was perhaps the largest and most important one, similar to those founded in other cities. From 1439 there is even evidence for a confraternity of pimps!

Böniger pays special attention in chapter five to the cobblers and their Society of Our Lady (*Liebfrauengesellschaft*), first mentioned in 1438. He makes this choice in part because he found the group's statutes, including a membership list, both of which are published here in an appendix. He notes that many of the cobblers may also have been tanners on the side, a state of affairs probably also reflected in the early deaths of many of them, no doubt related to the caustic chemicals they routinely handled. Here again he studies the families of three cobblers in some detail from the extant records. In all three cases, connections to the Society lapse after two generations, and the descendants were either fully assimilated or gone from Florence. Böniger notes that many of the names in the membership roll also occur in other cities and might reflect both a wider network of immigrants and continued wandering from city to city. It is difficult, though, to make absolute identifications from the available records.

The sixth chapter is concerned with "a minority in a minority," to use the author's words: occupations that required advanced training. Specific instances cited include merchants and international traders, metal workers (especially those who made weapons), artists and skilled craftsmen, manuscript copyists, and printers. He discusses a number of individuals from several of these categories, including a few who became suc-

cessful and widely known, including the Nuremberg merchant Hans Praun and the copyist Joachim Riss from Rothenburg. The case of Johannes Krach of Aachen is especially interesting because Böniger found the draft of a German letter by him to his brother in Aachen in which he talks about what he had been doing in Florence and elsewhere.

The final chapter describes one individual in considerable detail: Arrigho di Federigho "Martello." He appears in the historical record working for the Martelli, one of the most prominent Florentine families, from 1448 to 1496. Böniger demonstrates that not only did he achieve prominence as a servant in the Martelli household, but he was also the previously unidentified "Arigo" who prepared the first translation of Boccaccio's *Decameron* into German for the printer Johann Zainer in Augsburg. The evidence for the identification is found in a document specifying that Nanna, the daughter of the well-known cartographer Donnus Nicolaus Germanus should pay Arrigo twenty-eight florins for his translation of the "Centonovelle," a translation that he had given to the cartographer's nephew to be taken to Germany for printing. Furthermore, Arrigo also turns out to have been [the] cartographer Henricus Martellus, who played a major role in the late medieval Ptolemy reception in Germany through his updating of world maps as further information became available from explorers. The last chapter seems almost out of place compared with the sober sifting of archival evidence in the first three hundred pages. Both German Studies and historical cartography need to assimilate these findings, since they are based on solid archival evidence, and I hope that they are not too hidden in this dense historical monograph and overlooked.

And the work is, indeed, quite dense. 1,442 footnotes accompany about 350 pages of text, an average of more than 4 per page. The secondary literature is comprehensively included and discussed in these notes, but no bibliography is ap-

pendent. Instead, we find an index of persons and places (containing over one thousand entries), so one can find references to specific modern scholars in the index for referenced footnotes where their works are cited. This can be a rather cumbersome procedure. It also means that each time a work is cited after the first reference the reader is referred back to the first footnote instead of to a bibliography. Again, this structure seems unnecessarily complicated.

While Böniger's study is dense and difficult to read, it is also authoritative. It is unlikely that significant new material about artisan immigrants to Florence from Germany in the later Middle Ages will be uncovered. The reader will be struck repeatedly by the precariousness of the existence of the individuals who set out to seek their fortune in foreign lands. It would seem to bespeak the difficulty that average craftsmen had to make a living back at home. One is reminded willy-nilly of present day "economic refugees" who take desperate chances to find new opportunities for earning a livelihood, sometimes ending up in jail, sometimes deported for what must seem like arbitrary reasons, and sometimes simply vanishing from the records, even while other individuals achieve great success in their new environments against all odds. From the evidence Böniger presents, all of these outcomes occurred for Germans who set out for Florence in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

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Citation: William C. Crossgrove. Review of Böniger, Lorenz. *Die deutsche Einwanderung nach Florenz im Spätmittelalter*. H-German, H-Net Reviews. January, 2008.

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